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# GEORGIA PRESS RELEASE

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## 2002 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE DATA RELEASE

The National Agricultural Statistics Service announces the results of the 2002 Census of Agriculture. These data were collected in 2003 for the 2002 calendar year. A census of agriculture is conducted every five years to help measure the changes in Georgia’s number one industry. A farm is any place that sells or normally would sell \$1,000 in agriculture products during the census year. The census provides economic, demographic, production and inventory information about the farms that feed and clothe our nation.

Some Georgia comparisons of the 2002 data to 1997 census data:

	2002	1997
Number of farms	49,311	49,343
Land in farms (acres)	10,744,239	11,262,838
Average size of farm (acres)	218	228

Georgia farm numbers remained relatively constant due to the inclusion of deer and elk raised for slaughter; aquatic plants; and llamas, emus and ostriches. Land in farms continue to decrease due to urban encroachment. This fact also is represented in the change of market value of land and buildings from 1997. Market value of land and buildings per acre in 2002 was \$2,112 compared to \$1,550 in 1997, a 36% increase.

Market value of all agricultural products sold in 2002 of \$4.9 billion, actually decreased from the \$5.2 billion in 1997. Low crop and livestock prices contributed to this as well as the fact that Georgia was in the last year of a four year drought. Poultry and egg sales contributed \$2.8 billion to total sales and represents almost 57% of all sales. Production expenses in 2002 of \$3.8 billion also decreased from \$4.3 billion in 1997.

Detailed information about the farming operation and the operators themselves is only collected by the census. For instance the average age of 56.5 years for all farmers in Georgia increased from the 1997 census of 55.6 years. This continues the trend of our farmer operators getting older and as they retire from the off-farm workforce, they are more likely to consider themselves full-time farmers.

Farm organization, or how the farm is operated, is also described by the census. Ninety-one percent of Georgia farms were reported as being individually owned, 5% partnerships and 4% were corporations and various other categories.

Certified organic farms were reported separately for the first time in 2002. The census found 32 certified organic growers in Georgia with a total value of organically produced commodities of \$671,000, an average of almost \$21,000 per farm.

Sales of agricultural products directly to individuals increased by almost one million dollars from 1997. Direct sales in 2002 were almost \$9 million dollars compared to the \$8 million in 1997. A little over 1,600 farms reported direct sales.

### HISTORY OF THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

For 156 years (1840-1996), the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census was responsible for collecting census of agriculture data. The 1997 Appropriations Act contained a provision that transferred the responsibility for the census of agriculture from the Bureau of the Census to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The 2002 Census of Agriculture is the 26<sup>th</sup> Federal census of agriculture and the second conducted by NASS.

The first agriculture census was taken in 1840 as part of the sixth decennial census of population. The agriculture census continued to be taken as part of the decennial census through 1950. A separate mid-decade census of agriculture was conducted in 1925, 1935, and 1945. From 1954 to 1974, the census was taken for the years ending in 4 and 9. In 1976, Congress authorized the census of agriculture to be taken for 1978 and 1982 to adjust the data reference year so that it coincided with other economic censuses. This adjustment in timing established the agriculture census on a 5-year cycle collecting data for years ending in 2 and 7.

*Additional information from the census of agriculture can be found at the National Agricultural Statistics Service Website, <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>.*

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